

VZCZCXRO7014
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHLB #0280/01 0310810
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 310810Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1757
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000280

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2016

TAGS: [KISL](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: MGLE01: HEAD OF HIGHER SHIA COUNCIL ADVOCATES NEW
APPROACH FOR US POLICY

REF: 05 BEIRUT 3184

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) On January 30, the Ambassador met with Acting Chairman of the Higher Shia Council Sheikh Abed al-Amir Qabalan. Qabalan offered a critique of US policy in Lebanon and the Middle East, accusing the USG of practicing a double standard by not meeting with President Emile Lahoud and himself more often while, at the same time, relying too much on the March 14 coalition. Qabalan saw a simple solution to the Shia cabinet boycott: a declaration by Prime Minister Siniora that Hizballah is not a militia. The Ambassador clarified US policy, explaining that the USG wants the Shia ministers to return to the cabinet, though that must be a Lebanese decision. Also, the USG would back MP Saad Hariri's calls for an internal dialogue on Hizballah's arms, as long as everyone understand that real progress must be achieved. However, USG has not changed its position on Hizballah, the Ambassador noted, reminding Qabalan of Hizballah crimes that killed hundreds of Americans in the 1980s. Qabalan expressed a common (among Shia) belief that Hizballah was not behind the attacks on Americans. End summary.

CRITIQUE ON US POLICY
IN LEBANON

12. (C) During a January 30 meeting with the Ambassador, econoff, and political specialist, Acting Chairman of the Higher Shia Council Sheikh Abed al-Amir Qabalan offered his critique on US policy in Lebanon and in the region. Qabalan suggested that the USG was practicing a double standard in Lebanese affairs by not meeting with all parties equally. He said that the Embassy and USG should meet with President Emile Lahoud more often. Also, Qabalan wondered why NEA A/S Welch did not visit him during his recent trip to Lebanon. Qabalan continued that "that those who stand with you" (i.e. the March 14 coalition) will betray the US and make a deal with Syria. The USG must re-evaluate its policies in the region, too. Look at the Hamas electoral victory in the Palestinian Authority. "Occupation is terrorism," he declared. Qabalan added that he expected the USG to abandon Iraqi Shia to make a deal with the other Iraqi communities.

13. (C) Turning more positive, Qabalan confided that "a lot of people" ask him why he meets with the US Ambassador. His reply is that it is good to meet others, and that he meets with all the ambassadors. "No one supports terrorism; everyone wants to live in peace with others," said Qabalan,

voicing one of his frequent themes. Citing an Arabic expression, Qabalan stated that "wisdom is covered by a straw," meaning that the answer is plainly there. And the answer to the current Shia cabinet boycott is only a few words: "Hizballah is not a militia." If Prime Minister Fouad Siniora declares those few words, then the walk-out will end, claimed Qabalan. He then urged the Ambassador to intervene with Siniora, saying that "although you say it is not your business, it is your business." Turning to Hizballah's arms, Qabalan promised that if the USG calms down its rhetoric and "solves" the dispute over the Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills, then the Lebanese will have "50 solutions to Hizballah," such as merging its military wing into the Lebanese Army.

USG VIEWS ON HIZBALLAH
REMAIN UNCHANGED

¶4. (C) The Ambassador responded that, regarding the Shia cabinet boycott, the Embassy hopes that the cabinet is reunited as quickly as possible so that Siniora can make the necessary reforms to move Lebanon forward. The Embassy is not trying to push Hizballah ministers out of cabinet, as alleged in some of the popular rumors floating around, but rather would like the cabinet to come together. But, ultimately, this is a Lebanese decision, and the Embassy will leave this decision for the Lebanese to make. For example, MP Saad Hariri in Washington called for an internal dialogue on Hizballah's arms. The USG is willing to support this, understands that UNSCR 1559 will not be implemented immediately, but wants to see genuine dialogue leading to results.

BEIRUT 00000280 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Qabalan, as he has in previous meetings (reftel), asked the Ambassador about the USG relationship with Hizballah. The Ambassador replied that USG policy has not changed towards Hizballah and will not change until, inter alia, Hizballah answers for its crimes that killed hundreds of Americans in the 1980s. Some of the suspects in those crimes are still within Hizballah's leadership, the Ambassador pointed out. USG relations with Hizballah are not improving. The Ambassador added that before 9/11 more Americans had been killed by terrorism in Lebanon than in any other country.

¶6. (C) Qabalan indignantly asked why Hizballah is singled out. After all, Lebanese Forces MP Antoine Zahra is accused of killing 24 people at checkpoints and abducting Iranian diplomats during the civil war. Qabalan also professed ignorance about the reasons the USG accused Hizballah of the attacks on Americans during the civil war. The perpetrator could have been Amal, the Syrian Social National Party, the Progressive Socialist Party, or any other faction, said Qabalan with a straight face. The difference, replied the Ambassador, was that Hizballah killed Americans. Thus, the USG will not accept Hizballah as a non-terrorist entity until justice is served.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Qabalan expressed many common rumors and myths in the Lebanese Shia community as if they were fact. Many Shia deny that Hizballah (at least in its current form) was responsible for the terrorist attacks and kidnapping of the 1980s. There is also a pervasive belief in the Shia community that the USG is biased against the Shia. Qabalan also repeated, without prompting, the newly vogue phrase "the Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills," where he had simply referred to the disputed area as "the Shebaa Farms" before. End comment.
FELTMAN